

ORATION

DELIVERED

BY MR. S. RIGDON,

ON

THE 4th OF JULY,

1838.

AT FAR WEST, CALDWELL COUNTY, MISSOURI.

Better far sleep with the dead, than be oppressed among the living.

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ORATION.

Friends and Fellow Citizens;

By your request, I am called upon to address you this day, under circumstances novel to myself, and I presume as much so to the most of you; for however frequently we may have met with our fellow-citizens, in times past, in the places of our nativity, or of our choice, to mingle our feelings with theirs, and unite with them in grateful acknowledgments to our Divine Benefactor, on the anniversary of our national existence; but not before, have we been assembled by reason of our holy religion; for which cause alone, a very large majority of us is here this day. But though our residence here, is far from the sepulchres of our fathers, and from the lands of our nativity and former choice; and our association here, as novel, and as strange to ourselves, as it could be, to any portion of our fellow-men; still, we hail the return of the birth day of our liberties, with no less feelings of joy and gratitude: nor no less desire, for the prosperity and continuance, of the fabric of our national government, inspires our breasts this day, than when met in the mixed assemblies of all religions, as in times past, in the lands of our nativity.

Nor indeed could it otherwise be; from our infancy, we have been traditionated to believe ours, to be the best government in the world. Our fathers, our neighbors, and our associates in life, have extolled its excellence to the highest pinnacle of fame in our ears, even before we were capable of judging of its merits for ourselves, or were able to form an estimate of its worth. As we advanced in life, we heard nothing else from our statesmen and heroes, but the perfection and excellence of our political institutions, and the superiority of our government, over all the governments of the world; whether they existed in former or latter times. It is the government under which we were born and educated, or else we exchanged another for it, with whose form we were not satisfied, and in our hearts gave this the preference, and sought by removal to enjoy its benefits.

We have been taught from our cradles, to reverence the fathers of the Revolution, and venerate the very urns which contain the ashes of those who sleep; and every feeling of our hearts responds in perfect unison to the precept. Our country and its institutions, are written on the tablet of our hearts, as with the blood of the heroes who offered their lives in sacrifice, to redeem us from oppression. On its towers, the flag of freedom waves, and invites the

oppressed to enter, and find an asylum. Under the safeguard of its constitution, the tyrant's grasp is unfastened, and equal rights and privileges flow to every part of the grand whole. Protected by its laws and defended by its powers, the oppressed and persecuted saint can worship under his own vine, and under his own figtree, and none can molest or make afraid. We have always contemplated it, and do now, as the only true fabric of freedom, and bullwork of liberty, in the world.

Its very existence, has taught the civilized world, lessons of freedom, far surpassing those of a Pitt, a Wilberforce, a Canning, or a Grey, and has cast all their efforts in the shade forever. It has stood, and now stands, as the arbiter of the world, the judger of the nations, and the rebuker of tyrants.

Throughout the world, it is the standard of freedom, both civil and religious. By its existence, the fears of the superstitious have been removed, and the pretexts of tyrants have been swept away as a refuge of lies, and the rights of man have been restored, and freedom, both political and religious, have been made to triumph.

Our government is known throughout the civilized world, as the standard of freedom, civil, religious, and political; by it are the acts of all nations tried, and it serves to expose the frauds, the deceptions, and the crafts, of the old world, in attempting to pawn upon the people, monarchy and aristocracy, for republicanism and freedom. So powerful has been its influence, that the hand of the oppressor, even in the old world, has been lightened, tyrants have been made to tremble, and oppressors of mankind, have been filled with fear. Thrones, if they have not been cast down, have been striped of their terror, and the oppressed subject has been, measurably, delivered from his bondage.

Having been rocked in the cradle of liberty, and educated in the school of freedom, all our prejudices and prepossessions are deeply rooted in favor of the superlative excellence of a government, from which all our privileges and enjoyments have flown. We are wedded to it by the strongest ties; bound to it by cords as strong as death. To preserve it, ought to be our aim in all our pursuits, to maintain its constitution unviolable, its institutions uncorrupted, its laws unviolated, and its order undisturbed.

There is one thing, in the midst of our political differences, which ought to create feelings of joy and gratitude in every heart, and in the bosom of every wellwisher to mankind; that, all parties, in politics, express the strongest desire to preserve both the union and the constitution unimpaired and unbroken, and only differ about the means to accomplish this object; so desirable, as expressed by all parties. And while this, indeed, is the object of parties in this republic, there is nothing to fear. The prospects for the future, will be as flattering as the past.

In celebrating this, the anniversary of our independence, all party distinctions should be forgotten, all religious differences should be laid aside. We are members of one common republic, equally dependent on a faithful execution of its laws for our protection, in the enjoyment of our civil, political, and religious privileges. All have a common interest in the preservation of the Union, and in the defence and support of the constitution. Northern, southern, and western interests, ought to be forgotten, or lost for the time being, in the more noble desire to preserve the nation, as one whole; for on this depends the security of all local and sectional interest; for if we cannot preserve them by supporting the Union, we cannot by rending it in pieces. In the former there is hope, in the latter fear. In one peace, in the other war.

In times of peace, it ought to be our aim and our object, to strengthen the bonds of the Union by cultivating peace and good will among ourselves. And in times of war, to meet our foes sword in hand, and defend our rights, at the expense of life. For what is life when freedom has fled? It is a name, a bubble; better far sleep with the dead, than be oppressed among the living.

All attempts, on the part of religious aspirants, to unite church and state, ought to be repelled with indignation, and every religious society supported in its rights, and in the exercise of its conscientious devotions. The Mohameden, the Pagan, and the Idolator, not excepted, and be partakers equally, in the benefits of the government. For if the Union is preserved, it will be by endearing the people to it; and this can only be done by securing to all their most sacred rights. The least deviation, from the strictest rule of right, on the part of any portion of the people, or their public servants, will create dissatisfaction, that dissatisfaction will end in strife, strife in war, and war, in the dissolution of the Union.

It is on the virtue of the people, that depends the existence of the government, and not on the wisdom of legislators. Wherefore serveth laws, (it matters not how righteous in themselves,) when the people in violation of them, tear those rights from one another, which they [the laws] were designed to protect? If we preserve the nation from ruin, and the people from war, it will be by securing to others, what we claim to ourselves, and being as zealous to defend another's rights, as to secure our own. If on this day, the fathers of our nation, pledged their fortunes, their lives, and their sacred honors, to one another, and to the colonies which they represented, to be *free*, or to loose all earthly inheritance, not life, and honor excepted. So ought we to follow their example, and pledge our fortunes, our lives, and our sacred honors, as their children and successors, in maintaining inviolable, what they obtained by their treasure, and their blood.

With holy feelings, sacred desires, and grateful hearts to our Divine Benefactor, ought we to perform the duties of this day, and

enjoy the privileges, which, as saints of the living God, we enjoy in this land of liberty and freedom, where our most sacred rights, even that of worshipping our God according to his will, is secured unto us by law, and our religious rights so identified with the existence of the nation, that to deprive us of them, will be to doom the nation to ruin, and the Union to dissolution.

It is now three score and two years, since the God of our fathers Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob, caused the proclamation to go forth among the people of the continents, that the people of this nation should be free, and that over them, "kings should not rule, and princes decree authority;" and all this, preparatory to the great work which he had designed to accomplish in the last days, in the face of all people, in order, that the Son of God, the Savior of the world, should come down from heaven, and reign in mount Zion, and in Jerusalem, and before his ancients gloriously; according to the testimony of all the holy prophets, since the world began. And it is eight years, two months, and twenty eight days, since this church of the last days was organized, by the revelations of that same Jesus, who is coming to reign before his ancients gloriously: then consisting of six members only.

At its first appearance, excitement began to prevail among the people where it made its appearance, and as it increased in numbers, the excitement increased. The first attack made upon it, by its enemies, was by false representation and foul slander. By this engine it was assailed from every quarter, and by all classes of men, religious and unreligious: misrepresentation followed misrepresentation, falsehood after falsehood, followed each other in rapid succession, until there must have been multitudes of them created in a minute, by those employed in it, or else they could not have gotten so many put in circulation. This scheme not succeeding, the enemies had recourse to prosecutions, which were multiplied continually, apparently with determination, to destroy every person who united to aid and assist in bringing forth the work of the Lord. But all this not succeeding, according to the expectations of the persecutors; they united to all this power, that of mobs, driving men, women, and children, from their houses, dragging them out in the dead hours of the night, out of their beds, whipping, tarring and feathering, and otherwise shamefully treating them.

Nor were those means the only ones resorted to in this work of persecution, but being determined to put an end to the church forever; they added to all the rest of the means used, stealing the property of the saints, also burning houses and charging it on their [the saints] heads, in order to raise public indignation against them; as also false swearing, and indeed we may add, all other means which the adversary had in his power to use, nothing seems to be left undone, that could be done, by men and demons, in order that the purposes of God might fail; but still the object, so much desired

by many, has not as yet been obtained. Under all this fire of persecution, the cause has rolled on with a steady course; the increase has been gradual, but constant, and the church, at this time, numbers many thousands: some in the old world have become obedient to the faith, multitudes in the Canadas, as well as in most parts of the United States.

During these scenes of persecution, a number of the saints have lost their lives, and others are missing, and it is unknown what has become of them; but the presumption is, that they have been secretly murdered.

No country, of which we have any knowledge, has offered so fair an opportunity for determining the great hostility which exists naturally in the human heart against God and against his work, as this one. In other countries, persecutions were carried on under pretext of law; but in this country, where the constitution of the United States, and the constitution of every State in the Union, guarantees unto every person, the rights of conscience, and the liberty of worshiping as he pleases, to witness such scenes of persecution, as those which have followed this church from the beginning, in despite of law, justice, equity, and truth, and at war with the very genius of our republican institutions, and contrary to the spirit and design of our government; surely evinces the depravity of the human heart, and the great hostility there exists in the hearts of the human family, against the work and purposes of God; and most fully confirms the apostle's saying; that, "the carnal mind is enmity against God."

But notwithstanding all this violence, we can say as did Paul to the Corinthians: "We are troubled on every side, yet not distressed; we are perplexed, but not in despair; persecuted, but not forsaken; cast down, but not destroyed." We have until this time, endured this great fight of affliction, and kept the faith. If the ancient saints had to endure as seeing him who is invisible—so have we. If they had to suffer the contradiction of sinners against themselves—so have we. If they had to undergo fears within, and fightings without—so have we. If they had to suffer stripes and imprisonments, for their religion's sake—so have we. If they were often in journeyings, in perils of water, in perils among robbers, in perils by their own countrymen, in perils by the heathen, in perils in the city, in perils in the wilderness, in perils in the sea, in perils among false brethren. In weariness and painfulness, in watchings often, in hunger and thirst, in fastings often, in cold and nakedness—so are we. If they had to commend themselves to God, in much patience, in afflictions, in necessities, in distresses, in stripes, in imprisonments, in tumults, in labors, in watchings, in fastings; by pureness, by knowledge, by long suffering, by kindness, by the Holy Ghost, by love unfeigned, by the word of truth, by the power of God, by the armor of righteousness on the right hand and on the

Jeſt, by honor and diſhonor, by evil report and good report; as deceivers, and yet true; as unknown and yet well known; as dying and, behold, they lived; as chaste, and not killed; as ſorrowful, yet always rejoicing; as poor, yet making many rich; as having nothing, and yet poſſeſſing all things—ſo have we. If they went up through much tribulation, and waſhed their robes, and made them white in the blood of the Lamb—ſo have we to go up through a great tribulation; and we truſt in ſo doing, we will alſo waſh our robes, and make them white in the blood of the Lamb.

One cauſe of our heavy perſecutions, is the influence which thoſe have in the world, whom we have ſeperated from the fellowſhip of the church for their wickedneſs; who attempted to gratify their vengeance on us, and alſo to hide their own ſhame, by foul ſlanders and baſe calumny. We were at one time repreſented by them, as having all things common: at another, as being enemies to the government: and in other places we were reported to be abolitioniſts, and indeed any thing, they thought beſt calculated to ſtir up the public mind, and to excite popular indignation; and if poſſible, put an end to the work, by ſacrificing ſome of thoſe who were conſidered as moſt active in ſupporting and defending the cauſe. But through the mercy of God, we are ſtill in exiſtence, and have the opportunity of joining with you in the privileges of this day.

In aſſembling on this occaſion, our object is, not only to comply with the cuſtom of our nation in celebrating the birth day of our liberties; but alſo to lay the corner ſtones of the edifice, about to be built in this place in honor of our God, to whom we aſcribe the glory of our national freedom, as well as our eternal ſalvation; and whoſe worſhip we eſteem of more conſequence, than we do the treaſures of Miſſouri; ready at all times, to offer unto him the ſacrifice of our firſt fruits, and by untiring perseverance, patient industry, and faithful devotion to the cauſe of our God, rear this building to his name, deſigned, for the double purpoſe, of a houſe of worſhip and an inſtitution of learning. The firſt floor will be for ſacred devotion, and the two others, for the purpoſe of education. The building to be one hundred and ten feet by eighty, with three floors, and not far from thirty feet between the floors: all to be finiſhed, according to the beſt ſtile of ſuch buildings in our country. The entire expence, calculated at not far from one hundred thouſand dollars: all when finiſhed, to ſtand as a monument, of the power of union of effort and concert of action.

Next to the worſhip of our God, we eſteem the education of our children and of the riſing generation. For what is wealth without ſociety, or ſociety without intelligence. And how is intelligence to be obtained?—by education. It is that which forms the youthful mind: it is that alone, which renders ſociety agreeable, and adds intereſt and importance, to the worſhip of God. What is religion without intelligence?—an empty ſound. Intelligence is the root,

from which all true enjoyments flow. Intelligence is religion, and religion is intelligence, if it is any thing. Take intelligence from it, and what is left? a name—a sound without meaning. If a person desires to be truly pious in the sight of God, he must be purely intelligent. Piety without intelligence, is fanaticism, and devotion without understanding, is enthusiasm.

The object of our religion, is to make us more intelligent, than we could be without it, not so much, to make us acquainted with what we do see, as with what we do not see. It is designed to evolve the faculties, to enlighten the understanding, and through this medium, purify the heart. It is calculated to make men better, by making them wiser; more useful, by making them more intelligent; not intelligent on some subjects only, but on all subjects, on which intelligence can be obtained: and when science fails, revelation supplies its place, and unfolds the secrets and mysteries of the unseen world, leads the mind into the knowledge of the future existence of men, makes it acquainted with angels, principalities, and powers, in the eternal world; carries it into heaven and heavenly places, makes it acquainted with God, its Redeemer, and its associates in the eternal mansions; so that when science fails, and philosophy vanishes away, revelation, more extensive in its operations, begins where they [science and philosophy] ends, and feasts the mind with intelligence, pure and holy, from the presence of God.—Tells of eternal mansions, of immortal glories, of everlasting dominions, of angelic throngs, of heavenly hosts, of flaming seraphs, of crowns of glory, of palms of victory, of the saint's eternal triumph through a glorious resurrection; of songs of everlasting joy, of God the father of all, of Jesus the mediator of the new covenant, and of the blood of the sprinkling, which speaketh better things, than that of righteous Abel.

It not only acquaints us with these eternal things, but it makes known unto us the future history of man in time, of the purposes of God, which have to be accomplished before the end of all things comes. It warns and forewarns, of the wars, the pestilences, the famines, the earthquakes, and the desolations, which are coming on the earth. The rising and falling of nations: and also the desolation of the earth itself: the falling of the mountains, the rising of the vallies, the melting of the rocks, the purifying of the elements by fire: of the sun's vailing his face, the moon's turning to blood, the stars of heaven falling: of the heavens rolling away as a scroll; and of Christ's descending from heaven in a cloud, with the shout of the arch angel, and the trump of God. And of the wicked's fearing and trembling, of their faces gathering blackness, and of their seeking a refuge under the mountains, and of their calling upon the rocks to hide them from the face of him that sitteth upon the throne, and from the wrath of the Lamb; "For the great day of his wrath has come, and who shall be able to stand?"

All this mass of important intelligence, together with the final end of all thrones, and dominions, and principalities, and powers, and governments, which nothing else but revelation could make known, (for science, with all her powers, could never declare it, neither could philosophy, with her utmost stretch, reach it,) we obtain by our holy religion; for this is her province; it is the theatre where she acts; it is the business we have for her; it is to tell us things which nothing else could tell; it is to fill us with that kind of wisdom, which cometh down from above, and which is alone obtained by revelation, and by the powers which our holy religion confers, and by nothing else. In view then, of what we have already obtained, and of what there is to be obtained, we have assembled ourselves together in this remote land, to prepare for that which is coming on the earth, and we have this day laid the corner stones of this temple of God, and design, with as little delay as possible, to complete it, and to rear up to the name of our God in this city, "Far West," a house, which shall be a house of prayer, a house of learning, a house of order, and a house of God; where all the sciences, languages &c., which are taught in our country, in schools of the highest order, shall be taught. And the object is, to have it on a plan accessible to all classes, the poor, as well as the rich, that all persons in our midst, may have an opportunity to educate their children, both male and female, to any extent they please. So that all the talents in our midst, may be called forth, in order that we may avail ourselves, of all the means God puts into our hands, and put it into the power of all, to deliver themselves, from the impositions, and frauds, which are practicing upon the more illiterate part of the community, by those who have had superior advantages, or as far, at least, as learning can go to obtain this object.

One part of the house, shall be set apart for a place of worship, where we shall invoke our God for revelations, when we have gone as far as human learning can carry us, that by revelations, visions &c. we may fill the vacuum still left, after science and philosophy have done all they can do. So that we may have that understanding, and that wisdom which brings salvation, and that knowledge which is unto eternal life.

That whether there are wars, or famines, or pestilences, or earthquakes, or distress of nations, or whatever may come according to the purposes of our God, that we may know it before hand, and be prepared for it, so that none of these things shall overtake us; as a thief in the night, and while we are crying peace and safety, sudden destruction come upon us.

The Savior of the world himself, while he was here with his disciples, said, that, "As it was in the days of Noah, so should it be at the coming of the Son of man. They were eating, they were drinking, they were marrying, and giving in marriage, and knew not, till the flood came and swept them all away—So shall it be, at

the coming of the Son of man." And Paul declared to the saints of his day, "That the day of the Lord so cometh, as a thief in the night. That when the people are crying peace and safety, then sudden destruction cometh upon them, and they shall not escape. And that wicked men and seducers, would wax worse and worse, deceiving and being deceived." They will, says Peter, say, "where is the promise of his coming; for since the fathers fell asleep, all things continue as they were from the beginning of the creation."

Such is to be the state of the world, at the most important period in the existence of man's earthly residence. The description given by Isaiah, is tremendous in the extreme, "Behold, the Lord maketh the earth empty, and maketh it waste, and turneth it up side down, and scattereth abroad the inhabitants thereof. And it shall be, as with the people so with the priest, as with the servant so with his master, as with the maid so with her mistress; as with the buyer, so with the seller; as with the lender so with the borrower; as with the taker of usury, so with the giver of usury to him; the land shall be utterly emptied, and utterly spoiled: for the Lord hath spoken this word. The earth mourneth and fadeth away, the world languisheth, and fadeth away; the haughty people of the earth do languish. The earth is also defiled under the inhabitants thereof, because they have transgressed the laws, changed the ordinances, broken the everlasting covenant. Therefore hath the curse devoured the earth; and they that dwell therein are desolate: therefore the inhabitants of the earth are burned, and few men left."

The prophet Malichi describing the same scene and the same period of calamity says, "For behold, the day cometh that shall burn as an oven; and ALL the proud, and ALL that do wickedly, shall be stubble; and the day that cometh shall burn them up, saith the Lord of Hosts, that it shall leave them neither root nor branch."

The earnest David, in the majesty of his prophetic power, has left us a warning also when he says, "The mighty God, even the Lord hath spoken, and called the earth from the rising of the sun to the going down thereof. Out of Zion, the perfection of beauty, God hath shined. Our God shall come, and shall not keep silence; a fire shall devour before him and it shall be very tempestuous round about him. He shall call to the heavens from above and to the earth (that he may judge his people). Gather my saints together unto me; those that have made a covenant with me by sacrifice. And the heavens shall declare his righteousness; for God is Judge himself."

Having then knowledge of these things, and the voice of God being unto us, to gather together, and make a covenant with our God by sacrifice. We have given heed thereunto, and, are here this day as witnesses for God, that he has not spoken in vain, neither has he said in vain. But the day and the hour of his judgements sleepeth not, neither do they slumber; and whether men believe or do not believe, it alters not the word which God has caused to be spoken, but come it must, and come it will, and that to the astonishment, the confusion, and the dismay, of thousands who believe not, neither will they regard, until overtaken by it as a thief in the night, and sudden destruction come upon them, and there be none to deliver.

Knowing therefore the terrors of the Lord, we warn our fellow men. not only by precept, but example also, by leaving our former homes, to which we were bound by the strongest ties, suffering a sacrifice of the greatest share of

our earthly possessions. Many of us, in times past, were rich, but for Jesus' sake, and at the command of our God we have become poor, because he [Christ] became poor for our sakes; so in like manner, we follow his example, and become poor for his sake.

And as Moses left Egypt not fearing the wrath of the king, and refused to be called the son of Pharaoh's daughter, choosing rather to suffer affliction with the people of God, than enjoy the pleasures of sin for a season, having respect to the recompence of reward. So do we, we choose to suffer affliction with the people of God, rather than enjoy the flatteries of the world for a season.

It is not because we cannot, if we were so disposed, enjoy both the honors and flatteries of the world, but we have voluntarily offered them in sacrifice, and the riches of the world also, for a more durable substance. Our God has promised us a reward of eternal inheritance, and we have believed his promise, and though we wade through great tribulation, we are in nothing discouraged, for we know he that has promised is faithful. The promise is sure, and the reward is certain. It is because of this, that we have taken the spoiling of our goods. Our cheeks have been given to the smiters, and our hair to those who have plucked off the hair. We have not only when smitten on one cheek turned the other, but we have done it again and again, until we are wearied of being smitten, and tired of being trampled upon. We have proved the world with kindness, we have suffered their abuse without cause, with patience, and have endured without resentment, until this day, and still their persecutions and violence does not cease. But from this day and this hour, we will suffer it no more.

We take God and all the holy angels to witness this day, that we warn all men in the name of Jesus Christ, to come on us no more forever. For from this hour, we will bear it no more, our rights shall no more be trampled on with impunity. The man or the set of men, who attempts it, does it at the expense of their lives. And that mob that comes on us to disturb us, it shall be between us and them a war of extermination, for we will follow them, till the last drop of their blood is spilled; or else they will have to exterminate us: for we will carry the seat of war to their own houses, and their own families, and one party or the other shall be utterly destroyed.—Remember it then all MEN.

We will never be the aggressors, we will infringe on the rights of no people; but shall stand for our own until death. We claim our own rights, and are willing that all others shall enjoy theirs.

No man shall be at liberty to come into our streets, to threaten us, or mobs, for if he does, he shall atone for it before he leaves the place, neither shall he be at liberty, to villify and slander any of us, for suffer it we will not in this place.

We therefore, take all men to record this day, that we proclaim our liberty on this day, as did our fathers. And we pledge this day to one another, our fortunes, our lives, and our sacred honors, to be delivered from the persecutions which we have had to endure, for the last nine years, or nearly ten. Neither will we indulge any man, or set of men, in instituting vexatious law suits against us, to cheat us out of our just rights, if they attempt it we say we be unto them.

We this day then proclaim ourselves free, with a purpose and a determination, that never can be broken, "no never! no never!! NO NEVER."!!!